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Boston Bruins and FMC Team Up for Free Hockey Clinics

EDGE - Mar/Apr 2005

They came from all over New England for the once-in-a-lifetime chance to pick up a few tips from local hockey legends like Ken Hodge, hall of famer John Bucyk and Boston Bruins general manager and former blueliner Mike O'Connell. It was clear from the smiles on the faces of the kids - and the parents - that the free Boston Bruins Youth Skills Clinics presented by Facility Management Corp.'s hockey programming division, Bay State Hockey, were an unqualified success.

Hockey is a team sport focused on working together for common goals. With the NHL season on ice, the Boston Bruins, FMC and Bay State Hockey joined forces to promote the sport to local families in the absence of the regular television broadcasts and daily newspaper coverage that traditionally drive interest and enthusiasm across the region.

"Hockey in New England revolves around the Boston Bruins," noted Rick Nadeau, director of hockey operations for FMC. "Partnering with the Bruins to host a series of free clinics with some of their most recognized alumni is a great way to keep the kids excited about the game. It's great that the Bruins have taken such an active role in the program because their success as an organization has a direct impact on all levels of the sport throughout the entire area. We're really all in this together. It's truly a team effort."

That is exactly what the Bruins and FMC had in mind when they put together the plans for a series of free hockey clinics instructed by members of the Bruins alumni, front office and coaching staff. If the kids couldn't come to the Bruins, then the Bruins would go to them.
The program spanned a three-month period from November through January and featured visits to four FMC ice rinks throughout Massachusetts, with two events held at the FleetCenter in Boston, where the Bruins normally play their home games this time of year. FMC provided the ice time and the experience needed to organize such a large event, while the Bruins provided the on-ice talent and the excitement.

"We value every chance we get to interact with our fan base, particularly when it comes to children," said Charlie Jacobs, Bruins executive vice president. "By partnering with FMC, we were able to streamline the process of putting on these clinics by utilizing the infrastructure that FMC provides, from donated rink time to the actual scheduling and registration for these clinics.

"Hockey is the common thread among all of us who love the Bruins, from those who have had the honor of putting on a Bruins sweater to those who watch in the stands," Jacobs added. "It's a privilege that we're able to take these future Bruins and let them learn directly from our former players. Our fans are our greatest asset, and therefore we feel it is only appropriate that we show them the same support that they have so often shown us. We feel privileged to be able to make a positive impact in their hockey lives."

It's an attitude that reflects the Bruins' long-standing commitment to giving back to the community. And the alumni also benefit, because they enjoy the opportunity to skate with young Bruins fans.

"It's a lot of fun," said Bucyk. "We try to give the kids a lot of pointers, and if they can remember two or three of them over the year, then I think it's a big help for them. We concentrate on skating, of course, then stick handling and stuff with the puck. It's important for the parents to see that we're trying to help their kids. And we hope that they follow suit and help their kids learn as well. It's not

about yelling at them on or off the ice - it's important for everyone to remember that the kids are out there to have fun."

And they certainly did. More than 500 kids took to the ice as part of the program, some traveling as long as two hours just for the chance to skate with their hockey heroes. Each clinic was also followed by an autograph and photo session, which was just as popular as the on-ice events.

"My son John is excited to skate all the time anyway," said John Davenport, who is from Natick. "He didn't have the chance to watch these guys play for the Bruins, but I'm pretty excited about this opportunity and I think that rubbed off on him. He loves the Bruins.

"This is just such an outstanding event. I think this is exactly what professional sports needs more of - the athletes connecting with the kids and helping them learn to love the game."

The athletes were equally enthusiastic in their assessment of the clinics.

"It was amazing to be out there with a hall of famer," said Randy Pinard of Fall River. "It was the highlight of the season for me so far. The Bruins are our favorite team, so it was great to be able to skate with people who actually were Bruins."

For former Bruin Bob Beers, who remains heavily involved with the Bruins as the radio color commentator for WBZ Radio, the event was a reminder of his days as a youth hockey player.

"This is where we started," said Beers. "I know what these kids feel like. They're very enthusiastic and they all want to learn. It's fun to be out on the ice with them."

Bud Coom, whose grandson, Jack O'Connor, participated in one of the clinics, said: "My grandson is really into hockey. He's at the rink three or four times a week for practices and games. But it's quite an opportunity to get to skate with a guy like Johnny Bucyk." Quite an opportunity, indeed.